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Ὡς ποικίλον χρᾶγμ' ἐστί. Menander.
Various as thought can paint.

ADDISON has remarked, that "man is the merriest species in the creation; all above & below him are serious." The observation is undoubtedly just. Angels & brutes are equally distant from man in this respect, although upon different sides of the scale. Brutes have not the capability of mirth, & angels are too far removed from associations like our own, are of too refined, & too etherial a nature, to be moved at all by

those things which excite laughter in us. The brow of the seraph must never be unbent from its immortal majesty; the voice that is heard before the throne of God must never descend to the vulgar familiarity of mirth & gaiety.

Why man alone should possess this faculty, or propensity, & to the exclusion of all other orders of created being, is a question, which involves much conjecture. We can come, after all, to no satisfactory conclusion. It is not for us to scrutinize the designs of providence, nor to enquire, why we are thus created. It is enough that we are so, and we must bow with reverential awe to the decree of heaven.

It is a curious fact, that the nearer man approaches to the seriousness of the brute creation, the less does he possess of feeling, of taste,

of capability for refined enjoyment. The man of genius and of feeling, is alone possessed of the faculty of laughter in any high degree. We are disgusted at the cold & senseless being whom nothing can move to laughter; he seems unfitted for any of the social relations of life; we loath his presence, we are cautious of trusting him. But when we go to a higher order of beings, the scene is totally changed. In heaven there is nothing but joy; — but there is in heaven no mirth. The employments of spiritual beings are too sublime for this. The seriousness of angels & of spirits is the effect of their ineffable enjoyment; where all is blissful beyond human conception, but where all is mingled with that holy awe that the purest created spirit must experience ~~in it~~ the presence of the Almighty.

Perhaps, — and with awe we would hazard the conjecture, — perhaps, the faculty of laughter was given to man, in order to alleviate in some degree his sorrows while on earth. That it is a source of pleasure, is certain; — that it argues feeling & reason, is equally evident: the brutes cannot enjoy it, because they are not blest with reasoning powers; and as we cannot mingle in the employments of angels while on earth, this faculty has been vouchsafed, to enhance & our earthly gratifications. When death shall have withdrawn his sable curtain, — when the portals of eternity shall have opened upon our view, — when we shall be called to partake in the delights of etherial existences, — we shall then know what it is to be above mortal mirth, and to enter upon that sublime & thrilling extacy,

Whose eternal raptures can afford
no room for inferior enjoyments. Even
in this life, we may form some faint
idea of what shall be hereafter,
when, abstracted from all the cares
& bustle of life, from its troubles
& from its enjoyments pleasures, the
soul is lifted up in ~~rapture~~ ado-
=ration to heaven, and seems,
exalted for the moment from earth,
to join in that immortal choir
of beings, who sing their unceasing
anthems before their maker. In such
moments, laughter & mirth are
far from us. Earth cannot excite
a smile. Sorrow & pain seem to
fade away, and a celestial joy descends
to make its glad abode within our
bosom.

The mirth ~~we~~ of which we
have been speaking is, however, neither
inconsistent with virtue nor
religion. The sullen, the gloomy, &

the morose, must ever be unamiable. True religion does not call us to become of such a character. It checks not the sallies of innocent mirth; it only ~~commands~~ prohibits the excess.

But if this species of mirth be a characteristic of man, there is another kind, which is still more the peculiar attribute of humanity. It is that merriment, which arises neither from genius, nor taste, nor feeling; which has nothing elevated or pure in its nature; which degrades man below the level of the brute creation. It can laugh at the misfortunes of a fellow-creature, it can mock at his acutest sufferings; it bursts the bonds of pity, of gentleness, of moderation; it raises its obstreperous ~~mirth~~ voice upon

occasions, which should only excite commiseration, or inspire disgust. It herds with vice; it mingles with every abomination. It stamps the character of brutality upon its hotbed. It seeks to drown all care, & thought in its noisy violence, & is seen, wherever human crime has made its dreadful abode.

This vulgar mirth sometimes does not descend to crime; it often is mingled with more elevated feelings. But it is always liable to fall into it; and to relapse into that withering laugh, which curdles the very heart's-blood of the hearer; and which poets, in their descriptions of infernal spirits, have attributed to them, on the triumph of any villainous scheme, or the downfall of any virtuous principle in man.

The faculty, bestowed by heaven for beneficial purposes, fallen man has abused. He has applied it to the worst of ~~purp~~ ends. He has degraded himself in the scale of being, and has degenerated from the majesty of the seraph into the blackness of the fiend.

Man alone, of all creation, seems to live, indifferent to the past, the present, & the future. His brow wears the aspect of levity, & the storms of sorrow pass unheeded & unremembered. The butterfly phantoms of delusive pleasure lead him on continually. He trifles when he should be serious; - mirth is seen smiling upon his lip, when sadness should overwhelm him. The joys of heaven are too refined for his gross conceptions. He spurns the very idea of religion, because it commands a

greater gravity of demeanour. The brutes seek their own immediate gratification, without suffering themselves to be diverted by any other object. — Man roves from flower to flower, and plucks from none their sweets. Angels seek their delight in praise & worship; in celestial pleasures, whose bloom is perpetual: — man would rather grovel on, in the grossness of sensual gratification, with no real fruition, no lasting remembrance of delight. The harp that might resound the praises of the Supreme, lies neglected & unstrung. The heart that might awake to extacy & joy, is lost in mine, & buried in sensuality. Chained down to earth, the bursting spirit would in vain attempt to soar; her flagging pinions would soon declare how great a weight was placed beneath.

Such is man. Do we shudder at the Picture? — It is well: we have then some spark of hope. Is the delineation unfaithful or exaggerated? Let conscience answer, and her awful voice will declare that such is man. Such is he, the heritor of crime, the follower of the fall. Marked by trifling mirth & levity, his perpetual course betrays his character. Endued with exalted powers of reason & of intellect, he seems to slight them all, & to sink with wilful impatience into self-degradation.

Such is man, in his fallen state. But he is to be reclaimed! The immortal spirit is not forever to be lost in the gratifications of sense. There is a path open, by which he may escape; by which he may attain on earth some part of that felicity he has lost, & in heaven

its completion. But of the millions that inhabit the earth, how few direct their desires to this path! — How few seem anxious to rise above their degradation, and to stand forth the children of heaven, the heirs of life immortal! How many would rather descend to their long home cheerless & unblest; — without a hope beyond the grave, without a throb of joyous remembrance of the past. Perishable as the flowers of the field, and alike thoughtless, they spend their short career, — they sleep, they fade, & dream not of eternity; till, awakening from their torpor in the realms of sorrow, they are left to mourn throughout the long ages of eternity, their levity in life. The smile of mirth, & of happiness, is there quelled forever; all is

dark, and desolate, & dismaying.
But let us pause; — let us draw the
veil over those scenes, which mortality
cannot imagine; let us lament the
levity of man, and strive to improve
ourselves.

E.